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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Forty-seventh session
Agenda item 6

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION AND OF APARTHEID, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Joint written statement submitted by International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations and World Federation of Democratic Youth, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category I), African Association of Education for Development, American Association of Jurists, Indigenous World Association, International Association Against Torture, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, International Federation of Human Rights, International Indian Treaty Council, International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, International League for Human Rights, Pax Romana and World Society of Victimology, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category II) and Centre Europe-Tiers Monde, International Association of Educators for World Peace, International Educational Development, International Federation of Free Journalists, International Movement Against all Forms of Discrimination and Racism, Liberation and Movement Against Racism, for Friendship Among Peoples and Regional Council on Human Rights in Asia, non-governmental organizations on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[9 August 1995]

GE.95-13291 (E)

1. Our organizations are gravely concerned with the impunity with which the Sri Lanka armed forces continue to commit gross and inhumane violations of human rights and humanitarian law. We regret that attempts by the Sri Lankan Government to address international criticisms of its human rights record have been of a largely cosmetic nature.

2. In May this year, President Chandrika Kumaratunga declared that it might be necessary to launch an all-out attack in the Jaffna peninsula and that this "would mean a lot of civilian casualties" and the "place would be wiped out". In May, June and July the Sri Lanka armed forces launched a genocidal onslaught on the Tamil people in the Tamil homeland in the north-east.

3. In early July alone, 245 Tamil civilians, including around 100 women and children, were killed in the north. More than 470 were injured. Indiscriminate and incessant night shelling of Tamil villages in the north led tens of thousands of Tamil civilians to evacuate their homes. The Sri Lanka airforce indiscriminately bombed villages and targeted temples, places of worship and schools. Sellachennathy Hindu temple was bombed. St Peter's Church and St. Peter's School in Navaly, where hundreds has sought shelter from the incessant shelling, was bombed on 10 July 1995. More than 120 persons were killed including 13 babies who died in their mother's arms. The Pope has expressed his deep sorrow at the bombing of the church and the loss of civilian lives.

4. The Sri Lankan Government, initially denied the bombing of St. Peter's church. Then it criticized the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for reporting the incident to the world media without consulting the Government. Later the Government promised to hold an inquiry into the incident. Finally, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister declared that the Government will "boldly apologize" for the attack even before the findings of the inquiry.

5. The aerial bombardment of civilian population centres and places of worship follow a pattern set by the Sri Lankan armed forces over the past several years and President Kumaratunga's belated promise to investigate the recent violations must ring hollow in the ears of the Tamil people whose kith and kin have lost their lives or their limbs in the bomb outrage.

6. The Sri Lankan Government has also imposed a total economic blockade on the transport of goods, including supplies of essential food and medicines, to the north. Hundreds of Tamil civilians lie injured in Jaffna hospital without treatment. We note with concern that on 25 July the Sri Lanka navy seized food cargo intended for civilians in the north from a ship escorted by the ICRC.

7. The Sri Lanka Army has also unleashed a reign of terror in the east. Arbitrary arrests and reprisal attacks on Tamil villages in the Batticaloa area have become commonplace. Tamil civilians have been compelled by the Sri Lanka army to act as human shields to detect land mines in the east.

8. During the past few months, in Colombo, Kandy and elsewhere in the South, hundreds of Tamils have been arbitrarily arrested and tortured. Many have "disappeared", and bodies found floating in the waterways and lakes near Colombo have been identified as those of Tamils.

9. During the past 12 years, the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission have heard hundreds of statements expressing grave concern at the situation prevailing in the island of Sri Lanka. The record shows that it was the oppressive actions of successive Sri Lankan Governments from as early as 1956 and in 1958, and again in 1961 and again with increasing frequency from 1972 to 1977 and culminating in the genocidal attacks of 1983 that resulted in the rise of the lawful armed resistance of the Tamil people.

10. We are constrained to condemn the actions of the Sri Lankan Government as gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law, intended to terrorize and subjugate the Tamil people.

11. We urge the Sub-Commission to:

(i) Condemn the continued violations of human rights and humanitarian law by Sri Lankan authorities;

(ii) Call upon Sri Lanka to lift the economic blockade on the Tamil homeland and to find a political solution to the ongoing conflict; and

(iii) To monitor the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka as a matter of grave urgency.